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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes 10 research-based principles for improving children's reading achievement. The principles are: (1) home language and literacy experiences that lead to development of key print concepts are plentiful; (2) preschool programs are beneficial for children who do not experience informal learning opportunities in their homes; (3) skills that predict later reading success can be promoted through a variety of classroom language and meaningful reading and writing events; (4) primary-level instruction that supports successful reading acquisition is consistent, well-designed, and focused; (5) primary-level classroom environments in successful schools provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned; (6) cultural and linguistic diversity among children reflects the variations within the communities and homes in which they live; (7) children who are identified as having reading disabilities benefit from systematic instruction; (8) proficient reading in third grade and above is sustained and enhanced by programs that adhere to four fundamental features; (9) professional opportunities to improve reading achievement are prominent in successful schools and programs; and (10) entire school communities are involved in bringing children to high levels of achievement. Contains 30 references (three for each of the 10 research-based principles). (RS)

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Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children

10 Research-Based Principles

1. **Home language and literacy experiences** that lead to the development of key print concepts are plentiful among children who enter school prepared to learn to read. Joint book reading with family members helps children develop a wide range of knowledge that supports them in school-based reading. Once students are in school, parental help in the form of modeling good reading habits and monitoring homework and television viewing is associated with gains in student achievement. Programs that assist families in initiating and sustaining these sorts of activities show positive benefits for children's reading achievement.

2. **Preschool programs** are particularly beneficial for children who do not experience informal learning opportunities in their homes. These preschool experiences include opportunities to listen to and examine books, say nursery rhymes, write messages, and see and talk about print. Such preschool experiences lead to improved reading achievement in the school years, with some effects proving durable through grade 3.

3. **Skills that predict later reading success** can be promoted through a variety of classroom language and meaningful reading and writing events in kindergarten and grade 1. The two most powerful of these predictors are letter-name knowledge and phonemic awareness (the conscious awareness of the sounds in *spoken* words). Instruction that promotes phonemic awareness engages children in hearing and blending sounds. Activities that promote this attention to sounds can be motivating and playful for young children, including oral renditions of rhymes, poems, and songs, as well as writing their own journals and messages. Such instruction has demonstrated positive effects on primary-grade reading achievement, especially when it is coupled with letter-sound instruction.

4. **Primary-level instruction** that supports successful reading acquisition is consistent, well-designed, and focused. Teachers lead lessons where children receive systematic word recognition instruction on common, consistent letter-sound relationships and important but often unpredictable high-frequency words, such as *the* and *what*. Teachers ensure that children become adept at monitoring the accuracy of their reading as well their understanding of texts through instruction in strategies such as predicting, inferencing, clarifying misunderstandings, and summarizing. Instructional activities that promote growth in word recognition and comprehension include repeated reading of text, guided reading and writing, strategy lessons, reading aloud with feedback, and conversations about texts children have read.

5. **Primary-level classroom environments** in successful schools provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in teacher-guided instruction to everyday reading and writing. In these classrooms, teachers read books aloud and hold follow-up discussions, children read independently every day, and children write stories and keep journals. These events are monitored frequently by teachers, ensuring that time is well spent and that children receive feedback on their efforts. Teachers design these events carefully, using information from ongoing assessment of children's strengths and needs as the primary basis for new activities.

6. **Cultural and linguistic diversity** among America's children reflects the variations within the communities and homes in which they live and is manifest in differences in their dispositions toward and knowledge about topics, language, and literacy. Effective instruction includes assessment, integration, and extension of relevant background knowledge and the use of texts that recognize these diverse backgrounds. The language of children's homes is especially critical for schools to build on when children are learning to speak, listen to, write, and read English. There is considerable evidence that the linguistic and orthographic knowledge students acquire in speaking and reading their first language predicts and transfers to learning to read a second language. When teachers capitalize on the advantages of bilingualism or biliteracy, second language reading acquisition is significantly enhanced.

7. **Children who are identified as having reading disabilities** benefit from systematic instruction, but not at the cost of opportunities to engage in meaningful reading and writing. These children profit from the same sort of well-balanced instructional programs that benefit all children who are learning to read and write. Programs are characterized by intensive one-on-one or small-group instruction, attention to both comprehension and word recognition processes, thoroughly individualized assessment and instructional planning, and extensive experiences with an array of texts.

8. **Proficient reading in third grade and above** is sustained and enhanced by programs that adhere to four fundamental features: (1) deep and wide opportunities to read, (2) the acquisition of new knowledge and vocabulary, partially through wide reading but also through explicit attention to acquiring networks of new concepts through instruction, (3) an emphasis on the influence that the kinds of text (e.g., stories versus essays) and the ways writers organize particular texts has on understanding, and (4) explicit attention to assisting students in reasoning about text.

9. **Professional opportunities** to improve reading achievement are prominent in successful schools and programs. These opportunities allow teachers and administrators to analyze instruction, assessment, and achievement, to set goals for improvement, to learn about effective practices, and to participate in on-going communities in which participants deliberately try to understand both successes and persistent problems.

10. **Entire school communities,** not just first-grade teachers, are involved in bringing children to high levels of achievement. In successful schools, goals for reading achievement are clearly stated, high expectations for children's attainment of these goals are shared with all participants, instructional means for attaining these goals are articulated, and shared assessments are used to monitor children's progress. Instructional programs in successful schools may have many different components, including a range of materials and technology, but they maintain a focus on reading and writing. Successful programs extend into the home by involving parents in their children's reading and homework. Community partnerships, including volunteer tutoring programs, are common in such schools.

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